

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

1865

Two Biographical Sketches of Gabriel Furman

The Faust Club of Brooklyn

William Gowans

Paul Royster (transcriber & depositor)

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, proyster@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

of Brooklyn, The Faust Club; Gowans, William; and Royster, Paul (transcriber & depositor), "Two Biographical Sketches of Gabriel Furman" (1865). *Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries*. 28.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/28>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Two Biographical Sketches of Gabriel Furman

The following two biographical sketches of Gabriel Furman (1800–1854) appeared in the reprint edition of Notes, Geographical and Historical, Relating to the Town of Brooklyn, on Long-Island published in 1865 by the Faust Club of Brooklyn. The first is by the (unidentified) editor and compiler of that volume; the second is by the publisher and bookseller William Gowans.

The pagination, spelling, punctuation, and orthography of the original have been retained. Notes at the foot of the page are those of the original editor.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Cohen Library of the City College of New York for the generous loan of their copy of this rare volume.

Furman's Introduction and Notes to his 1845 edition of Daniel Denton's A Brief Description of New-York may be found at <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/23/>

*Paul Royster
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
March 6, 2006*

PREFATORY NOTE.

CONSIDERING the period at which they were written, Furman's "Notes on Brooklyn" possess extraordinary merit as a local history. Clear in their style—accurate, in the main, as to facts, there is, within these modest duodecimo pages, more of the *condensed* results of thoughtful research and careful analysis, than is apparent to one who has not made the history of Brooklyn a particular study. Yet, in presenting to the public a new edition of the "Notes," the "Faust Club" have been mainly influenced by a desire to rescue from fast gathering oblivion the memory of the first, and, up to this time, the ablest historian of Brooklyn. For, though but ten years have elapsed since his death, yet owing to the peculiar reticence of his character, and his solitary manner of life, he seems to have become, even in the minds of those who best knew him, almost forgotten.

It is, then, in the light of a testimonial to the memory of our foremost scholar and antiquarian, that we would have this reprint regarded. The work as here reproduced, is an almost perfect *fac-simile*, from the press of the oldest printing office in Brooklyn, where the original

IV

edition was printed more than forty years ago. The accompanying MEMOIR is from the pen of one who was almost the only person who could claim Judge Furman's intimacy during his life, and the NOTES are mainly devoted to the illustration of obscure points, or the correction of errors, which have been disproved by the more recent discoveries of historical students, or the development of new information since Judge Furman wrote.

It may be interesting to bibliopoles, who delight in trifles of this sort, to know that some of the same type which was used to set up the original title page, has also been used in the reproduction of the title page of this edition.

In the hope, therefore, that this "labor of love"—as it has been to all concerned in its preparation—may possess some little value as a contribution to the *literary biography* of our country, this new edition of the "Notes" is respectfully submitted by

THE FAUST CLUB, of Brooklyn.

March 30, 1865.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

GABRIEL FURMAN.

Gabriel Furman, author of the Notes on Brooklyn, although but a few years ago moving in the midst of men, has already become almost *a myth*. The members of his immediate family circle have departed, his collections of books, laboriously gathered, have been scattered. No portrait of him is known to exist. There are few memoranda to be found in the papers which have been preserved, and few recollections in the minds of his remaining friends by which he can be distinctly recalled and presented to the readers of the present time.

The writer of this sketch was perhaps as well acquainted with him, and with his thoughts, habits and feelings as any of his contemporaries were permitted to be. The writer was however ten years his junior, which makes his distinct personal knowledge of Judge Furman to commence at the time when the Judge was about twenty-one years old, and began to take part in the public affairs and social movements of the then incorporated village of Brooklyn.

Gabriel Furman was born in Brooklyn, Kings County

VI

on Long Island, January 23d, in the year 1800. After diligent search among his relatives and connections, a family record was found which fortunately preserves this fact.

He was born in the homestead of his father, William Furman, which stood in 1822 and for some years after, on the south side of Fulton Ferry, at No. 5 Fulton street, just upon the water line, on the site now occupied by the office of the Brooklyn City Rail Road Company.

The family of Furman first came to Newtown, Long-Island, from Old England by way of New England, and settled there in 1651. From Newtown, they scattered upon the Island.

William Furman, his father, came to Brooklyn from New Lotts just after the Revolution, filled various prominent offices, was first Judge of Kings County from 1808 to 1823, village trustee in 1817, after the village incorporation in 1816; Supervisor for several years, Member of Assembly from 1824 to 1826, and for many years President of the Brooklyn Fire Insurance Company, incorporated in 1824.

But little is known of the schoolboy days of Gabriel Furman. A diary left by him shews, that from October 1814, to November 16, 1816, he was at school at Columbia Academy, Bergen, New Jersey. This diary is ruled with open columns, in which he notes the state of the roads and weather. It shews besides that he had a school-boy's enthusiasm toward the fair sex, although he always remained a bachelor. Some allusions also shew that even at this early time he was apt in allusion to literary and classic characters.

He studied law in the office of Elisha W. King, Beek-

VII

man-street, New-York, entering 27th June, 1823, and was with him a favorite student, from his characteristics of method and steadiness, as well as for eminent analytic qualities of mind. These qualities attended him in a large degree after his admission to the bar, during several years of practice in the Courts, and Judicial experience, and never during life altogether left him. There was no period during his somewhat erratic and clouded career, when Judge Furman would not have been considered a good lawyer. A learned Judge, long one of his most valued friends, speaking of some papers prepared by him in a chancery proceeding, not long before his death, said, "they would have been considered fair work for the ablest solicitor."

But however well suited the mind of Judge Furman seemed to be in its general structure, to the processes and investigations of the law, and although he had fair reputation at the bar, and in the Court of Errors of this State, while a Senator, yet there is abundant evidence that the toils of jurisprudence were not the most consonant to his tastes.

Among his memoranda occur these reflections :

"As to politics and contest for office, they are entirely dissimilar to my habits of feeling, and very unpleasant, and nothing but an imperious sense of duty to my country would ever induce me to enter at all into them, or to have any sort of connection with them.— My wish would be, if possible to be attained, to pass my life as a literary man, and a humble enquirer into the history of my country—never to mingle in political strife—never to hold an office of any kind; but quietly to while away my time among my books and

VIII

papers, and when it pleased the Almighty Disposer of all events to call me hence, to lay my head on the pillow of death in peace with all men. There is nothing on earth to compare, in the least degree, with the joy and comfort which attends literary research, with the inward satisfaction which results from a day thus spent. It strikes me that a man truly literary can never be immoral."

Again, "No one but a person who possesses, what the world calls, 'a taste for reading,' in its true sense, and has improved the taste by years of practice, can duly appreciate the meaning and force of Hunt's remark as 'to doat upon old books.' It is a passion which gains strength by what it feeds on, and affords an unalloyed pleasure, far, very far, transcendently far, beyond what can be afforded by any other pursuit in this life. It also renders a man to a great extent independent of the world for his happiness and enjoyments. Society with its pleasures is not with him as it is with thousands, everything. He has another World, unaffected by toils and troubles—in which there are no storms or tempests; but everything is peace, calm and sunshine—an eternal Spring and Summer, having at once the promise and the fruition. And to this blessed World he can withdraw at pleasure, and there associate and 'hold sweet converse' with those great and noble Spirits, of which the World of mankind, the common World, is not worthy.

"This to the uninitiated in the secrets of Knowledge, may sound like nonsense, or at least like enthusiasm; but those who have tried the experiment, and have become the denizens of that happy World, (and all men

IX

can be so at their pleasure in this country,) know it is nothing but truth, plain naked truth."

It is not to be doubted, that had circumstances enabled Judge Furman to follow entirely the strong bent of his historic and antiquarian predilections, he would have produced works of greater scope and completeness than he has left behind him.

During the Summer of 1814, the students of Columbia Academy, Bergen, New-Jersey, tendered their services to the Committee of Defence in the City of New-York, marched over to Brooklyn with a flag and worked all day on the works, at Fort-Greene, now Washington Park, Brooklyn. Furman, who was one of them, in recording this transaction says, "I feel a pride which every free born American ought to feel in saying, this is the second day I have worked to raise fortifications during this contest, to protect my country from an invading foe."

Nov. 9th, 1816.—At Bergen, N.J., while still at the Academy; he says, "this evening I spent very agreeably chatting with the girls trying to persuade them there was no such passion as love,—a fine employment for a boy about sixteen—however, I could not succeed."

He began almost as a boy to make memoranda of meteorological occurrences and of facts which attracted his attention in reading.

He never went to College, though it is evident that he gave a share of his time at the schools he attended, to the study of the classics, and had a fair knowledge of the Latin and Greek authors. He was fond of attending the "Commencements" of Columbia College, from which fact many of his friends supposed he had gradu-

ated from that institution. An appeal to its records, and a further investigation shew that he was never a student of any College.

In 1820, he was active in forming a debating Society in the City of Brooklyn, in the exercises of which he evidently took a conspicuous and interested part. He was also about this time an earnest advocate of the right of Brooklyn to participate in an equal degree with New-York in the establishment of Ferries, between that city and Brooklyn.

In 1824, at the invitation of the citizens of Brooklyn, he delivered the Fourth of July Oration, in the Dutch Reformed Church in Joralemon Street.

In 1827, he was appointed by Governor Clinton a Justice of the Municipal Court of Brooklyn, then just established, with John Garrison and Thomas Kirk as associates. This office he filled with credit for three years.

As his judgment ripened, his taste for Antiquarian pursuits and learned investigations increased, until they held the chief place in his mind. With him this taste seems to have been intuitive. It is not known that he derived it from any example or associations. He became a haunter of book-stands and libraries. He began to collect a library of his own, which gradually became rich in every class of curious learning, and in that of Astrology perhaps superior to any other in the country. He lost no opportunity of increasing his own written collections and memoranda. As these accumulated he had them substantially bound in neat and symmetrical small quarto volumes, which had reached the number of sixteen at the time of his decease. Of these volumes twelve can be traced since the dispersion of his library.

These volumes seem to be a heterogeneous medley, and embrace almost every conceivable topic of curiosity or inquiry, from the most scientific to the most absurd and trivial. These are thrown together without order in a perfect chance-medley. A little may be found here "*de omnibus rebus et ceteris aliis.*" Perhaps the most prominent topic is that of extraordinary recipes or cures of disorders, which involve faith in some principle a little superstitious. Indeed it is not to be doubted that his mind had a tendency to superstition as he remarks, in these memoranda "that all men have at times a strong tendency to superstition." The next principal topic is perhaps the weather, about which he is curious to note the peculiarities and changes from year to year, with comments on such phenomena as he deems may affect health. Then there are notes upon books, shewing an extensive knowledge of those which are rare and curious. Shakspeare, in all that can elucidate his history, has a large share of his attention. The drama in all ages and in all phases enlisted his eager interest.

In the midst of this "mighty mass of miscellaneous matter," it is fortunate that the local instincts of Judge Furman led him to jot down all that occurred to his observation in the elementary condition and progress of his native city. His mind early turned toward its charters, traditions, revolutionary reminiscences, and the facts of its early settlement and population, agriculture and trade. He seemed to have an intuitive and prophetic sagacity as to the importance of describing, recording and fixing the dates of many things of his own time, which would change with progress and be forgotten.— The minuteness of some of these details may look like

XII

folly and simplicity, but still the better critics will admit that they go to make up his reputation as an Antiquarian of the best character who knew that these "details" would grow to be the very things that "posterity would delight in." Already in the rapid rush of population for the past thirty years, since Brooklyn assumed the character of a city, the old buildings and land-marks have been swept away, and but for "Furman's Notes" and "Guy's Picture of Brooklyn," it would be impossible to trace its beginnings.

The "Notes on Brooklyn," first scattered in these note books and common place books were brought together to some extent in 1822, to oblige his friend, Col. Spooner, between whom and himself existed a strong friendship, and published in his first directory of Brooklyn. At his suggestion, Judge Furman was led to amplify them and present them in the form in which they are so well known and highly appreciated by the families of "early Brooklyn." Although time and opportunity have greatly increased the materials of Brooklyn History, and made some corrections in the work of Furman, it still contains "the very marrow" of our early history.

It is due not only to his memory, but to the study of local history, that a new edition should be printed of a work which has now become very rare. The original edition, printed by Col. Alden Spooner, was but of 250 copies, and in the hands of early residents, every copy is now held to be worth "*a Jew's tooth*." Proposals for this were issued December 30th, 1824, and the work published in March, 1825, though the imprint bears the date of 1824.

XIII

He was an ardent lover of nature, delighting in solitary rambles, frequently noting among his memoranda any objects or occurrences which struck his attention, often accompanied by moral and religious reflections.— Of one of these walks, September 28th, 1821, he says:

"The country looked beautiful, tinged with the golden tints of the setting sun—all around was still and calm. Oh, when I finish my course in this life, may I depart with like glory, and may my end be like this setting sun—to rise on a glorious morrow."

Judge Furman was an active and zealous member of the Protestant Episcopal Church. His father, William Furman was warden of St. John's Church, (of Rev. Evan M. Johnson,) in Johnson-street, from the time of its erection in 1826, and his son Gabriel, the subject of this sketch, was for several years Vestryman and Treasurer thereof. It is the testimony of the Rev. Evan M. Johnson, the first Rector thereof, (yet living,) that he was in all things, during his connection with that church, a bright pattern and example of Christian and manly virtue. He did not think "a purer young man ever lived." In the building and decoration of the church his knowledge of ancient church proprieties enabled him to be of material aid. He delighted in mediaeval patterns of stained glass, and was a fixed friend of the cheerful Christmas custom of decorating the church with Evergreens.

In this connection we may as well introduce an anecdote coupled with his name, told us by the same venerable clergyman, now seventy-two years old.

When he was about departing for Europe some years ago, he had a parting interview with Judge Furman

who said to him, "you will of course visit Cambridge?" Mr. Johnson replied, "Yes." "Then," said the Judge, "when you visit the College, be sure to inquire for the Library of Samuel Pepys." Mr. Johnson visited Cambridge, and preached there, taking up his lodgings opposite Trinity College. His particular and intimate friend while there, had long been a professor of the College. After he had seen the ordinary shows, Mr. Johnson inquired of this professor "where he could find the library of Samuel Pepys?" The professor assured him there must be some mistake—there was no such library in Cambridge! "But" said Mr. Johnson, "I know there is. My informant is one of the most distinguished and accurate antiquarians in America, and could not mistake on such a point. This Library was bequeathed by Samuel Pepys to Magdalen College." His pertinacity set the professor upon inquiry, who returned to him with a face of utter amazement. "It is all true," said he, "and I have been in this College twenty-five years, and never before heard of it! But it is no wonder. We of the College are not allowed to see such things. They are reserved only for distinguished visitors." On applying to the Vice Chancellor a special permission was obtained to visit the Library of this distinguished Antiquary and Book-Collector. Here Mr. Johnson saw everything kept just in the order and condition in which Samuel Pepys had left it. He was particularly curious in Old English ballads, some of which were lying strewn upon the floor, just where they had dropped from his hand.

Judge Furman was one of the Committee to erect the Court House and Jail in Raymond-street, Brooklyn, of

which Gamaliel King was the Architect. In this building the Judge indulged his taste for the antique, and his admiration of the Gothic style, being particular, among other things, that it should exhibit a massive oaken door with all the graining and other natural peculiarities of the wood. His nicety in this particular availed but little, as a subsequent Board of Supervisors had the door carefully painted with a thick coating of a brilliant and glaring white.

In November, 1838, he was elected to the Senate of this State, in which he served for 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842. The records of the Senate, which was at that time the Court of Errors, shew that he was industrious and able on the judicial side of his duties. He also made some statesmanlike speeches, particularly the one touching the Canal policy of the State, which he always favored. His full speech, made in 1842, reported in the Albany Evening Journal during that year, on the policy of completing the public works, at an expense upon which the interest could be realized from tolls, is a masterly and laborious exposition of the whole subject, as cogent in argument as it is rich in statistics.

In 1841 he delivered two valuable and interesting lectures on the Discoveries of the Northmen and of Aborigginal Remains in America, before the Brooklyn Lyceum. These were repeated before the Mercantile Library Association, New-York, the Young Men's Christian Associations of Albany and Troy, and afterwards at Utica, Canandaigua and Rochester.

In 1842, Luther Bradish was nominated for Governor and Judge Furman for Lieutenant-Governor by the Whig Party of the State. They were not elected.

XVI

The writer thinks an anecdote connected with Judge Furman and this campaign may not be amiss as it exhibits strikingly a peculiarity, which in the end made him not only a recluse, but an exile from his friends. When his nomination had been secured by the exertions of some very warm friends, it became desirable to secure his letter of acceptance. He was written to without reply. It was understood that the publication of the letter of Mr. Bradish was withheld to be made at the same time with Judge Furman's. This never came.— The writer was requested, with Theodore Eames, Esq., the law partner of the Judge to call on him at the Eagle Hotel, Albany, and repair the omission. The call was made at about eight o'clock in the morning, on their way to Utica by the early train to attend the confirmatory convention. On asking to be shewn to the Judge's room, the boy of the Hotel flatly refused, saying, "It is against positive orders." On being informed of the urgency of the occasion, that we two were his near friend, and law partner who would see him but a few minutes, and that the fate of his election might turn upon it, the boy still said "it can't be done—he won't see any body!" As we turned away despairingly, the question was thrown out, "what time in the day does the Judge get up?"—"Four o'clock in the afternoon," curtly responded the lad. It was a hopeless case. The delegation proceeded by the morning train, and it is believed that the ordinary letters of acceptance were never given.

As a further confirmation of his habits while Senator, at Albany, the writer inquired of a respectable and worthy Senator from the first district, a political colleague of the Judge and constantly on the same committees,

XVII

what he thought of him? His reply was, "I don't know him. He comes and goes as he pleases—fires off a mile or two of his canal speech every day, and never associates with any body."

1843, October 25th, he delivered the Annual Address before the American Institute, at Niblo's, New-York.

1844, October 10th, he delivered the Annual Address before the Queens County Agricultural Society.

In addition to the "Notes on Brooklyn," Judge Furman, at the instance of William Gowans of New-York, the well known dealer in ancient books, has enriched Denton's History, first published in 1670, with a body of valuable notes. In an advertisement appended to this he promises a History of a tribe of Welsh Indians which early settled in America. This work has never yet appeared. This story of Madoc and his voyage to the West Indies in 1170, was well calculated to enlist both the speculation and love of exploration which belonged to the mind of Judge Furman.

When that great work, the Natural History of the State of New-York had been determined upon, a letter was sent to him by Gov. Seward, dated June 13th, 1842, which concludes as follows:

"Will you do the State so great a favor as to furnish notes concerning what has been accomplished in regard to Antiquities and also the History of Book Printing.

Your friend and humble servant,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD."

It is not to be doubted that such a commission would have commanded a zeal and elicited a wealth of learning which few other men possessed. The original plan, however, was altered, and the article written by Judge

XVIII

Furman was not used, at least in fullness or form as it was written. Concerning this matter, Judge Furman has left the following note :

“I was anxious that so great a work as the ‘Natural History of the State of New-York’ which was intended to comprise some ten or twelve quarto volumes, and which would be first issued and many of the volumes published under the Whig administration of the State, should be not only a credit to the State, but that it also should not impair the high claim which we as a party had always held to advancing literature in our country. With this view I urged upon Gov. Seward that the introduction to the first volume should be a literary history of the State, divided into different heads; and that each subject should be treated of distinctly, and thus made as perfect as possible by itself without reference to any other head; that the space required for such introduction was a matter of no moment compared with the importance of having it valuable and complete as such a work would probably never again be published by the State. The Governor assented to my view of the case and soon after addressed me the annexed letter, and I prepared and forwarded him the articles of which the original draft follows in this volume. To my surprise some time after I found that some gentlemen in Albany had advised him to a different course and that he had adopted it and prepared the introduction as we now have it and which has been found great fault with by ‘Silliman’s Journal,’ and other Reviews.”

In lecturing his enunciation was clear and distinct, though free from emphasis and enthusiasm.

There are extant of the writings of Judge Furman,

XIX

besides those above alluded to, the second volume of an attempted catalogue of early American Books, also an abstract of the English Laws of the Province, compiled probably while he was a student at law. The friend who brought him to Brooklyn, in his last illness, gathered up the remnants of books and papers remaining in his New-York lodgings. These were deposited for some months in the ferry house at the Fulton Ferry, Brooklyn side. The books, enclosed in a box, were uninjured and reached their appropriate place among the books of the Long-Island Historical Society. The loose papers (which are supposed to have been mainly law papers and of small value) were nibbled into the smallest fragments by rats.

“Man proposes, but God disposes.” We have quoted above, the views of Judge Furman as to the happiness and morality of a life devoted to literary research. The simple and pure lives of many Antiquaries, Historians and Book-men, would seem to confirm his opinion. In the maturity of his years however, after he had in some degree accommodated his tastes to his sense of, duty to his country, and enjoyed preferment and tenders of higher preferment, he began to exhibit some phases of conduct and character hardly consistent with perfect sanity. Without detail, the result of these were to leave his family without the protection of a roof, to leave a father and sister helpless and dependent upon others, to die at last in obscurity, while his books and manuscripts were sold by the Sheriff of Kings County. His father died before him, October 16th, 1852, his only sister, Martha, survived him a few years, dying February, 1863. His own life went out amid clouds and darkness.

It is believed by the most intimate of the friends of Judge Furman that his errors and infirmities had their radical source in THE USE OF OPIUM, which he began to take in very small quantities during the cholera season, 1832. This habit at first narrowly restricted and always carefully concealed, increased upon him, until in the end it clouded his faculties, blunted his moral convictions and sensibilities, made him forget ambition and neglect duty, and become a seeker of solitudes aloof from family and early friends. The friends of Judge Furman all agree that he was rarely known to partake of other stimulants.

Judge Furman was by his habits a secluded and isolated man, but not by nature unsocial. When engaged in literary pursuits he disliked to be interrupted. If however a friend by a *coup d'etat* got beyond the barriers he interposed, he was always kind, courteous and conversational, rarely if ever betraying the slightest temper or irritation.

It was rare that Judge Furman chose to dine with more than one person. When first Judge of the Municipal Court, he invited Judge M——— to dine with him at the Cafe Francaise. Judge M———, (supposing a third equally intimate would increase the pleasure,) extended the invitation to Judge R———, Judge Furman at once found an excuse for postponing the dinner.

His frequent visits to New-York were rarely made in company with any one. He would be seen at the book-stands, in the streets, at the libraries, or crossing the ferry entirely alone, never with any appearance of abstraction. In the Brooklyn City Library which at one time he much consulted, he would come quietly in, regard

nobody, make his investigations, and disappear without a word. If any one chose to address him he was frank and affable.

Although without the quality of piquant wit, or even humor, yet no man relished the latter quality more than he. In the grotesque meetings got up at the Apprentices' Library to oppose the resolution of Gen. McClure, taking the tax from dogs and imposing it upon bachelors, when Jacob Patchen was put in the chair, Judge Furman was, to use a phrase of the time, "*a prominent rowdy*." He also modified his characteristic solitariness so far, as to form a principal member of the Society of "*Trampers*," who in a fellowship of some half-dozen, visited Communipaw and other places, writing sportive essays thereon. But this was in the earlier time. On the second marriage of his friend Col. Spooner, he presided at the supper table, and kept up continual merriment by popping off the champagne corks, with the expression invariably, "*Silence gentlemen, the chairman is about to make a report*." His isolated habits increased with years until he came to deny himself to his best friends and on the most important occasions.

Judge Furman was of the middle height, well made, with a face of brownish color, tending to length, a prominent Roman nose, and a well made forehead, from which some of the hair seemed to have been removed to give it additional height. He was always neatly dressed in a frock coat of snuff colored or greenish cloth, with light pantaloons and vest, and shoes with spatter-dashes. His black fur hat carefully brushed, was turned up at the sides. His neck-tie was a little gay and ornamental — His *tout-ensemble* was that of a polished gentleman, while

there was a peculiarly quaint and prim air about him, which suggested the scholar or antiquary. His pace in walking was very measured and deliberate.

The homestead at the foot of Fulton-street was encroached upon in the widening of that street. It was afterwards sold, and Judge Furman about 1836 removed to the house 103 Willow-street, which he occupied several years. Here he was framed amid his books which filled the front room of the second story in convenient alcoves, and kept himself as far as possible secure against intruders.

This homestead was suddenly broken up in the wreck of his financial affairs, and the inmates sent forth to seek shelter without the least warning. He himself soon after took lodgings in the city of New-York, and became from that time forth an exile from his friendships and associations. He prepared the catalogue for the sale of his library, which was sold in New-York to pay his debts. For a considerable space his haunts were understood to be at Communipaw, Bergen Point, and Jersey City, (scenes of his early youth and later rambles,) where his associates were the fishermen of the region. At one time he was certainly interested in the searches prosecuted on the North River near Cornwall, to recover treasure understood to be sunken in one of "Captain Kidd's" vessels. In spite of the abundant evidences presented by the Hon. Henry C. Murphy, in his article in the Merchant's Magazine, and others, to shew that no vessel of "Kidd's" was ever sunk in the place indicated, Judge Furman gave to the stock issued the support of his antiquarian reputation, which no doubt aided in making victims to this bubble and delusion. Nothing could

more shew the changes his mind had taken toward delusions, than the fact that in the *earlier soundness* of his judgment, he had treated this whole theory of "Kidd's" vessel as an absurdity, and commented upon the innumerable diggings for his fabulous gold as the supremacy of folly.

After long absence he returned among his friends, and seemed as though he had left them but the day before. He was always poor and required some pecuniary assistance, and seemed ready to occupy a desk in an office and address himself with ability to some professional work. These occasions were fitful, and soon followed by a return to his secret haunts.

At length in 1854 it became known to one of his best and most steadfast friends, that he was sick and unable to move from his lodgings. These were found to be a small bed-room in a Hotel in Frankfort-street on the site of the old Dutch Church. Here he was found in a miserable condition, with his limbs and body covered with painful ulcers, so that, to use the phrase of his friend, the flesh dropped off from his bones. He was provided with a serving man for a few days, when, as it was evident his strength was failing, the friend alluded to, procured a carriage, and had him carefully conveyed to the Brooklyn City Hospital, Raymond-street, next to the Court House and Jail he had assisted in erecting, holding him in his arms all the way. He was in a state of extreme debility and stupor. As the carriage passed the facade of the jail his face lighted up with a gleam of intelligence and recognition, and to the question of his friend, "do you know that?" he nodded assent. He was placed in the Hospital, and had the most assiduous at-

tention until his death, which occurred on the day he entered, the 11th of November, 1854, of "chronic diarrhoea," as stated in the books of the Institution.

The writer there looked his last upon that countenance once so familiar, but would have found no trace of identity, save in the marked character of the Roman nose, always a dignifying feature of his somewhat remarkable and decidedly intellectual face. His funeral was attended from that Institution by a few friends and professional brethren. He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, in the burial lot of his aunt, Mrs, Boyd, who but a few months ago died in Brooklyn, at the age of 96.

In seeking persons familiar with the feelings and pursuits of Gabriel Furman, the writer could not neglect his long esteemed friend and adviser, William Gowans, elsewhere referred to as the publisher of the *Bibliotheca Americana*. This gentleman kindly put upon paper his recollections. These have been found to embrace so much that is interesting and characteristic, that I have taken the liberty to present them in the form adopted by the writer.

REMINISCENCES
OF THE
Hon. GABRIEL FURMAN,
BY
WILLIAM GOWANS.

To the "Faust Club" of Brooklyn:

Gentlemen:—If I should send a motto for your memoir, it would be :

"To attend to the neglected and to remember the forgotten."—BURKE.

The Honorable Gabriel Furman, of Brooklyn, Long-Island, was a man whose memory I still call to affectionate remembrance; his didactic conversation, his demeanor and staid appearance are all still as fresh in my mind's eye as in those halcyon days when he used to visit my store of books. He was a native of Brooklyn, Long-Island, born in or near the year 1800.

I will endeavor to describe some of his mental characteristics and his personal appearance, or rather how he appeared *to me*. He was small of stature, compactly built, walked with a slow and measured step, as if in deep meditation, his complexion was brown, with a smooth or soapy appearance, his eyes dark and twinkling, strongly marked aquiline or Roman nose, middle cartilage descending lower than the exterior covers, a high forehead. The whole head and face taken altogether, I should say, had a decided resemblance to

Mons. Pascal's, the famous French Philosopher, and devout Christian; as represented by a portrait of him lately discovered, and which accompanies the late French editions of his works as well as the English; his hair black, soft as silk or Thibet wool, his hand as mellow and plump as that of any young lady, such an one as Lord Byron would have greatly coveted. He was always dressed in the neatest style, in cloth of invisible green, olive, or black; taken altogether he might easily have been taken for a Turkish Mufti, especially, if he had been found among the Orientals. As a general thing in walking through the streets he had a book or books under one arm, more especially if he was going from New-York to Brooklyn.

He was among the first and steadiest as a purchaser of books, and I may here confess, that he it was who mainly by his advice, as well as his extensive purchases of American Literature, directed my attention to that specialty. The literature of the New World, at that time (1830) stood very low in the estimation of Americans in general.

For some time the Hon. Sir James Stuart of Dunern, Scotland, Samuel G. Drake, Esq., of Boston, and the Hon. Gabriel Furman, were the only buyers of American books.

Our intimacy commenced in this way. Upon a very genial afternoon in the month of September, 1831, he came along Chatham-street, and spying a book establishment at No. 121 of very tiny dimensions, and scantily stocked with indifferent books arranged around the walls, he entered it, made a long and careful examination of the contents, without uttering a word, and at

last when he had got through, stepped up to me with two aged volumes in his hand, and asked me what would be the price of them? I of course very willingly made answer to the query, inasmuch as I was very anxious to sell. The book proved to be the Miscellaneous Works of John Toland, one of the free writers on religion and politics of the age of Queen Anne, of whom England swarmed with such at that time, Lord Bolingbroke standing at the head. This book among other curious matters, had a history of the British Druids, the article which had more especially attracted his attention, and which prompted him to purchase the grim old volumes. Respecting the history of this copy of said work, I begged his attention for a short time, till I had said a few words concerning it. This book appeared from the book plates affixed inside of each first cover, to have at one time belonged to Lord Fullerton of Carstairs, County of Lanark in Scotland. Said Carstairs was in the vicinity of my natal home, and I remember the character that this eccentric Lord bore in the neighborhood, not only for his religious and political opinions, but for his social habits. He had the reputation of having a very large and curious library, a rather uncommon appendage to a homestead in a country place, and further it was known that he would freely *lend* his books to any one who could give security for their safe and uninjured return. This security consisted in a note payable on demand, the sum named being four times the market value of the book. A ledger account was kept with the borrower, the name and price entered and value of the book charged at the time when taken away, and the time named when to be brought back. If failing to comply with the

terms the fourfold price of the book became forfeited, the sum was demanded by a messenger sent to the delinquent by his lordship. I have understood that lawsuits have grown out of these "Tom Thumb" contracts. Now these volumes that I sold to Mr. Furman, must have been got from his library, by some one who failed to return them, and they must have been brought to America by some emigrant who afterwards disposed of them on this side of the Atlantic. I purchased the volumes at the sale of the late Rt. Rev. Bishop Hobart's Library, which was sold shortly after I became a bookseller.

He took great interest in the narrative, and I remember, when one of the portions of his library was sold, that identical copy of Toland's *Miscellaneous Works* made its appearance, and in it this whole narrative was amplified, and written upon inserted writing paper, with much additional matter respecting the Fullerton family, as well as a dissertation on the Infidel writers of the times of Lord Herbert, Collins, Toland, Wollaston, Mandeville, Tindall, Blount, Shaftesbury, Morgan, Chubb, and afterwards Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and Gibbon. Who became the fortunate purchaser of these interesting volumes I know not; they are no doubt in the possession of some diligent collector, either in New-York city or in the far-west.

Thus commenced my intimacy with the Hon. Gabriel Furman, which continued without interruption, until he became financially, as well as physically, unable either to purchase or visit my book-store. He called on me weekly, and sometimes oftener, and seldom made a call without making a purchase.

But what added to the value of his visits, was his advice and counsels to me, then a very young man, which possessed great interest, and proved afterwards of vast importance in my line of business. He had the old English Nobleman's notion of buying books at auction. He never attended one of these sales, but if anything turned up that he was particularly desirous of possessing, in any collection to be sold, he would call upon me, or write and request that I would purchase the books designated by him in the catalogue. He never named any price, and was invariably satisfied with all my purchases or even those that I declined to purchase, on account of price or condition.

As a book buyer, and consequently collector, it may be safely affirmed, that he had no equal in the country at the time. Some who are collectors, or familiar with the fraternity, may think this an exaggeration, but this would only prove that they had no knowledge of his habits in this line. His appetite for books was insatiable, indeed so much so that it interfered with his profession to his pecuniary detriment. As an instance of this taste for accumulation, he had certain favorite authors, of whose works he bought every edition, as well as all commentaries, dissertations, or any printed book or pamphlet touching them or their works. Among the most conspicuous of these authors were Shakspeare, Milton and Burns; of the former he had so many editions that the number of volumes united would count over one hundred, and of treatises illustrative of the same, several hundred. Shakspeare, in his estimation, was the greatest and the grandest of all Authors, excelling his contemporaries in depth, breadth and

brilliancy as far as the sun excels the moon in giving light.

He spent much of his time in the study of the English Drama, and dramatic literature. His study had a particular fascination for him, and as a consequence he had become quite familiar with the works of the principal authors, more especially the contemporaries of Shakspeare, and their immediate successors of the ages of Charles I. and II. His desire was to accumulate the works of every dramatic author, as well as the leading histories and illustrations of the Drama.

He made a rail-fence or zig zag tour through Long-Island, from Brooklyn to Montauk-Point. He wrote an account of this tour, wherein much matter was embodied touching the remnants of Indian tribes still lingering on the Island, as well as much of historical and statistical research, concerning the Island at large. This interesting tour was never published. He is understood to have placed it in a hollow tree during his rambles and never to have regained it.

He commenced the collecting of American books, when as before hinted the taste in this country was limited to but a few. I sold him numerous books and pamphlets, which now would realize from ten to fifteen times the amount which he paid for them.

I will give a few examples:

Smith's Hist. of New-Jersey, a fine copy, \$2 00.

Smith's Hist. of New-York, large, fine paper, clean copy, \$4 to \$4 25.

Cotton Mather's Magnalia, fol., t'7 50.

Thomas's Hist. of Printing in America, 2 v. 8vo, bds., uncut, \$2 00.

Smithes Hist. of Virginia, 2 v. 8vo, bds., \$3 00.

* Yates & Moulton's Hist. of New-York, 2 v., 8vo, bds., \$2 00.

Hazard's American State Papers, 2 vols., 4to, bds, uncut \$4.

Original Edition of Denton's New-York, \$5 00.

Mathew Carey's American Museum, 12 vols, \$9 00.

Niles's Register, 75 vols., \$50 00.

American Remembrancer, 17 vols., 8vo, \$17 00.

Besides many pamphlets at from ten to fifteen cents, which would now realize dollars.

He was a stanch Episcopalian, and had a decided leaning to, and affinity with what is called the high church party of that denomination, even to the lighting of candles in church during divine service, in the day time.— On this subject he and I could not agree for five minutes at a time. He was a great admirer of the English hierarchy, not only of their principles, but of their theological and literary abilities. Jeremy Taylor, Hooker, South, Barrow, Atterbury, Waterland, besides some of the leading puritan writers, were favorite authors.— Works on Demonology, Witchcraft and Supernaturalism generally, were also a favorite class of books, which formed a part. of his collection. Amongst them he had a copy of the Works of the famous Magician, Cornelius Agrippa, in 2 vols. 4to., Life of Apollonius Tyrannus, the Sybilline Oracles, and many others of kindred character.

He wrote a book to prove the existence of a tribe of

* I had over two hundred copies of this book in sheets, which is now worth \$20 a copy, which I used for wrapping paper. I never think of this sacrifice but with regret

Welsh Indians in America, a subject which has engaged the attention of many besides him. He was a firm believer that such a tribe did exist, and is still existing, located somewhere on or west of the Rocky Mountains. Catlin in his book on the N. A. Indians favors the like belief. This book was intended to form No. 2 of my *Bibliotheca Americana*, but unfortunately soon after the manuscript was put into my possession, waiting for publication, he called one day and requested to be permitted to take the same home with him, as he had not only corrections, but additions to make. He accordingly carried it off, and I never saw more of it. What has become of this precious relic, I never could learn. It is my opinion that a portion of his library is still secreted somewhere either in Brooklyn or New-York. Should this turn out to be so, the lost treasure may be recovered. Many books of notable mark he got from me, I have never been able to trace : for example, there was a folio copy of Denton's New-York, (only four copies printed,) Works of Cornelius Agrippa, 2vols., 4to. Almond's American Remembrancer, 17 vols., 8vo., Thomas's History of Printing, 2 vols., 8vo, bds., uncut. These as well as many others, I still recollect of, were never sold with any portions of his library, that I have seen sold, and I think I have witnessed all that have been disposed of by public sale.

He was never married, and from all that I could observe or learn he was one of the most indifferent to the influence and charms of the fair sex that could well be imagined.*

* In regard to this trait, it is enough to state, whether for good or ill, that there is evidence that Judge Furman, though remaining a bachelor, was not inattentive to the charms, nor free from the thralldom of the fair sex [EDITOR.]

It was usual on his visits to my book-store, for the conversation to turn upon other matters and things besides books, book selling and book buying. On a certain occasion it turned upon the distress caused to those who were afflicted with fever and ague. I remarked that I had a friend who had been unusually tormented with this disease. He observed that a cure could be very easily effected, and he would with pleasure give me a receipt to that end. He forthwith proceeded to give me an oral prescription as follows: "Go to a certain tree at the full of the moon, armed with a certain number of pills, (the ingredients of which they were to be composed, I now forget,) go around the tree three times to the right, and again three times to the left, then stop on the side upon which the moon shines, place the back straight up against the tree, facing the moon, and remain in this position for a certain time. This being over, bore with an auger a hole into the tree behind where the patient stood, then place one half of the pills into the auger hole, and swallow the other half. This ceremony being concluded, let the patient go home, and immediately go to bed, and next morning he would find that the pestiferous ague would have taken its everlasting departure, from the body of the wearied sufferer."

I listened with great gravity to all this, but the cure appeared so preposterous, as well as ridiculous, that I burst out laughing. At this indecorous and unmannerly return for his kindness, he became quite angry and made some remarks corroborative of the state of his mind.— I apologized in the best manner I could, and so the matter ended.

This is the only instance in which I ever remember to

XXXIV

have observed him out of temper, and our intimacy had existed for fourteen years. Credulity on certain subjects was one of his peculiarities; the marvelous and supernatural on many subjects and things appeared to him as positive as mathematical facts; he was a firm believer in the authenticity of the celebrated Moon Hoax by Locke, also of the Captain Kidd* Gold deposit in the Hudson River near Caldwell's Landing, and of the existence and power of Witches.

A few cunning speculators got up a Company for the purpose of lifting the gold supposed to be lying in the bottom of the Hudson River, deposited thereby the celebrated freebooter, Captain Kidd. Said company sold their shares in considerable numbers to the credulous believers in this gross imposition. To give credit to the trick, this company procured an old rusty cannon, which apparently had been long under water, purporting to have been taken from Kidd's sunken ship in the Hudson River, near Caldwell's Landing. This gun laid in Wall-Street for many weeks, exhibited to the gaze of the credulous and incredulous multitudes. Many in consequence became purchasers of the stock. Among that number was my friend Gabriel Furman. I need hardly add that not one of those outside of "the ring," ever saw one cent of their money returned.

* This was a latter day belief, contradicting his former writings and convictions. [EDITOR.]